

No one left in cold for Christmas

Altruism overflows despite economy

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DENTON — Dec. 21 saw the receipt of more than \$30,000 of toys and gifts collected by the Caroline County Department of Social Services' Neighbors in Need crew.

The collected gifts filled an entire room at the District Court building, even spilling into the corridor.

The gifts came to the needy through many different avenues. Some families, organizations and businesses adopted families buying them specific gifts. Others donated money for Caroline County Department of Social Services to appropriate among their registered families who will be struggling to provide this Christmas.

"Unfortunately there are hundreds of families who, without this help, would have nothing under their Christmas tree," said Melissa Jones-Harris, Caroline County Department of Social Services volunteer administrator.

Thanks to this program, many families who literally have to choose between either paying rent or buying Christmas presents can enjoy the holiday spirit. Jones-Harris said there were more than 500 individuals on the register to receive gifts. That's a donation of more than \$60 per person.

Stretching through the room are gadgets and gizmos galore.



Photo by Benjamin Williams
Melissa Jones-Harris (left), Anne Jones (center) and Carrie Willis show off some of the merchandise that will help a needy family this year by providing otherwise-empty stockings. The surrounding gifts stretch in all directions filling the room outside the picture's frame, spilling far out into the hallway.

The toys reach all ages, from flying machines, dolls and teddy bears, to watches, Discmans and scooters. Clothes hang everywhere.

The *Star Democrat's* Brighter Christmas Fund helped amass \$17,500 for the volunteers. Coupled with individual donations from businesses and organizations, as well as adopted families, and community compassion, Caroline County Department of Social Services was empowered in a shopping trip that dropped \$10,000 at the Eastern Wal-Mart and more than \$5,000 at the Dover Mall.

Jones-Harris said, "Dover Mall was more willing to give us discounts. Old Navy (for one example) gave us 20 percent off our whole purchase. We went where people gave us discounts, [where we could better increase our buying power]."

Jones-Harris said that some money in the fund was kept aside to assist in medication costs for the elderly and to provide alarm guards.

The act of altruism exemplified here is redoubled in its extent and significance if you take into account the total community involvement. North Carolina

High School, for example, adopted 85 children. Students stretched their kindness through their families and classmates, to cooperatively increase their compassion's scope. Allfirst Bank had a toy dropoff box in its foyer. Peoples Bank ran a toy drive and adopted a family. Throughout the entire county the more fortunate stepped forward to help those in need. These acts of community come small and large — one gift addressed a bed-ridden elderly woman's ennu, providing a 19-inch television, and WebTV Internet hookup.